

Krzysztof Kozłowski

Warsaw School of Economics

The Colour Revolutions in the Post-Soviet Space: Illusion and Reality of the Post-Soviet Civil Disobedience

Abstract

The political events that took place at the end of 2003 in Georgia, in 2004 in Ukraine and in 2005 in Kyrgyzstan are popularly called the Rose, Orange and Tulip Revolution or collectively: the Colour Revolutions in the post-Soviet space. At first glance the term “revolution” may seem appropriate. The Colour Revolutions have resulted in the regime change in all the three states. However, from a decade-long perspective one may notice that the revolutionary changes in the political systems of Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan did not actually take place. The post-revolutionary reality: the Russian-Georgian war and criminal charges against the revolutionary Georgian President Micheil Saakashvili, the infamous ending to the political career of the revolutionary leader Victor Yushchenko just four year after the Orange Revolution and the spectacular collapse of the Victor Yanukovich regime, which led to a hybrid warfare with Russia, or Kyrgyzstan’s permanent political instability following the revolutionary events of 2005 require yet another insight into what has happened in Tbilisi, Kiev, and Bishkek. Without an in-depth analysis of the events, it is impossible to understand the fundamental social and political dynamics of the ongoing and future changes in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus or Central Asia. The re-evaluation of the Colour Revolutions is not only of historical importance, though. It is also a universal lesson concerning the most important challenge that all the democratic social movements active in the authoritarian or post-authoritarian states have to face: how to manage large-scale civil disobedience protests of a disappointed society while the ruling governments do not follow democratic rules and the international community does not fully comprehend the significance of the ongoing changes.

Keywords: the Colour Revolutions, Civil disobedience, regime change, the post-Soviet space

Introduction

The Rose Revolution in Georgia, the Orange Revolution in Ukraine and the Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan allowed many political scientists to form a hypothesis of another democratic wave spreading in the former Eastern Bloc, this time in the post-Soviet space [Avioutskaa, 2006, p. 213]. However, the consequences were quite the opposite. The autocratic regimes in the region limited the freedom of the then already weak civil society institutions and conducted pre-emptive political attacks against the opposition activists. This developments coupled with the disappointment with the revolutionary political elites, the political radicalisation and autocratic trends in Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan eventually made many observers doubt the revolutionary or even democratic character of the events in Tbilisi, Kiev, and Bishkek. It suffices to point out that the power change in 2010 in Kyrgyzstan and the end of the Victor Yanukovich rule in Ukraine in 2014 did not spur any discussions concerning the democratisation of the post-Soviet space comparable to the democratic euphoria in the 2003–2005 time period. Followed by the Russian annexation of Crimea and the undeclared war in Eastern Ukraine, today the Colour Revolutions are perceived as the subject to historians' rather than politicians' discussions. The broader international perspective seems to indicate that this is not the most fortunate course of events, though.

The interpretations of the Colour Revolutions were dominated by two general approaches. On the one hand, their critics saw them as the form of aggressive exports of the Western democracy standards to the post-Soviet space, allegedly sponsored by the U.S. On the other hand, their supporters perceived them as spontaneous and genuinely democratic rebellions that brought down the autocratic governments and initiated pro-democratic changes. Both approaches had strong geopolitical connotations. The first one was promoted by the Russian Federation and the authoritarian post-Soviet states, which were afraid of the bottom-up changes happening beyond their control, that may have threatened the future of the ruling, mostly post-communist regimes. The other one was strongly promoted by Western countries perceiving the events as a chance to weaken the Russian influence in the post-Soviet space. Thus, the opponents of the Colour Revolutions see them as instrumentally inspired by the foreign forces against the ruling regimes and as antagonistic toward Russia. The supporters of the ideas of democratic changes after the collapse of the Soviet Union depict them as the final fulfilment of the prognoses of the fourth wave of democratisation and the success story of liberal democracy. Both sides are to a certain extent right. Both are also partly wrong.

The post-revolution reality requires another, a more multidimensional analysis. The Russian-Georgian war, the infamous ending to the Victor Yushchenko rule, the spectacular collapse of the Victor Yanukovich regime, Kyrgyzstan's permanent political instability: all the post-revolutionary developments require a different insight into the Rose, Orange and Tulip revolutions and at the civil disobedience patterns they represent. Without an in-depth analysis of the events, it is impossible to understand not only the fundamental social and political dynamics of the ongoing and future changes in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus or Central Asia. As the Colour Revolutions were driven by genuine civil disobedience, which never enjoyed a proper democratic or even more general political representation, their analysis also provides a universal lesson concerning the most important challenge that all the democratic social movements active in the authoritarian or post-authoritarian states have to face: how to manage large-scale civil disobedience protests of a disappointed society while the ruling governments do not follow democratic rules and the international community does not fully comprehend the content of the ongoing changes.

To comprehensively approach the topic, the paper is divided into two parts. The first one concerns the nature of the colour revolutions in the post-Soviet space. Calling them revolutions turns out to be an intellectual shortcut. The political crisis which spurred in the form of mass demonstrations and protests in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan created an impression of political systems first falling apart and then getting assembled back again by the new rulers of the states concerned. This led to a false assumption that the power change that resulted from the protests was an emanation of the systemic change while it remained just the elites' reshuffle. The second part of the paper deals with the problem why the true nature of the Colour Revolutions was missed by the international community. As time passes by, it turns out that calling the Georgian, Ukrainian and Kyrgyz events revolutions provided a convenient explanation for every actor interested in promoting their own interests in the post-Soviet region while the results of the events were revolutionary in the very name, exclusively. The revolutionary interpretation was useful both for the Western-like supporters of the changes (to expand the sphere of influence), the pro-Russian antagonists of the regime reshuffle (as it provided a handy explanation of their failure in the region because of the Western expansion) and for the new political elites as well (they were the only ones able to fill in the political void left after the post-communists' collapse). However, everyone seemed to overlook the last element of the puzzle – the societies that took their grief to the streets to be left without any representation when the dust of the political battle settled.

The Nature of the Colour Revolutions

The political change always takes place in a cultural and historical context of a certain social structure constituting the pool of the available political assets and opportunities. Thus, the social and political innovations to a certain extent always grow out from the existing social and political context. This means that every political change is partly based on social constructs it runs against. The cases of an absolute change and of the creation of something qualitatively new in terms of the whole social and political system are historically extremely rare. The best examples are the archetypes of the French and Soviet revolutions. This leads to a conclusion that as various challenges to the development of a political system enforce change, in reality they rarely lead to their absolute transformation.

The transformation of Eastern Europe and the post-Soviet space follows the above pattern. As the analysts of the post-communist change in Eastern Europe agree, societies far more often witnessed a recombination of political structures and institutions rather than the creation of an absolutely new political system from scratch [Staniszki, 2005, p. 135]. Following T. Carothers, one may state that Georgia in 2003, Ukraine in 2004, and Kyrgyzstan in 2005 set the perfect examples of the continuation of this trend. According to his observations, the ideal of a democratic transformation, when the democratic breakthrough is followed by a democratic consolidation of the political regime did not happen in reality. Instead, while analysing the political developments in all the three states one could have observed a chaotic reorganisation of the political reality, which quite often combined parallel pro- and antidemocratic trends with occasional shifts toward the authoritarian form of rule. The fact that the new elites assumed power following the mass protests against the rigged elections did not translate into a genuine affinity to the democratic ideals or the rule of law, nor the intention to introduce them in public life. In the reality of the turbulent changes and political instability the authoritarian measures turned out to be far more appealing. The consequences – the innumerable political challenges ahead of Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan – are now at sight [Carothers, 2002, p. 20]. However, despite knowing this, most of the observers failed to notice the true nature of the political changes brought about by the Colour Revolutions. The question remains: why?

One of the most important yet most often overseen challenges in terms of the research concerning the post-Soviet space involves using the terminological framework developed in the Western political schools of thought to analyse the non-Western

political context¹. In the post-communist context the terms such as democracy, reform, transformation, and revolution may have quite different connotations or even meanings than in the Western political science dictionary. For example, if one looks closely at the process of Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan gaining independence in 1991, one may doubt if the Soviet rule was actually “defeated”, if it had “collapsed” or “disintegrated” in a fairly uncontrolled manner like many Westerners claimed, or if it was “deconstructed” by the ruling elites who accepted the compromise with the opposition forces and together tried to peacefully manage the transformation². Mikhail Gorbachev’s policies were intended to reform the Soviet system. In reality, however, they unveiled its deficiencies and led to its end. The Perestroika unintentionally uncovered the deep deprivation of large parts of societies living in the Soviet states as well as the lack of the effectiveness of the party elites to exercise control over the state affairs they were supposed to run. On the one hand, the compromise with the opposition created the opportunity for a peaceful change. On the other hand, the strength of the opposition translated into the scope of the compromise – from substantial concessions of the ruling elites and the abolition of the communist parties in Eastern Europe where the opposition was well established, to the easily reversible changes in Belarus where the opposition was barely existent.

The new political order introduced by the fall of the USSR in the post-Soviet states was not a straightforward democracy. It was a function of three parallel processes leading to more or less democratic solutions that now exist in the former Eastern Bloc countries. The processes involved:

- 1) introducing, not always in an agile manner, the broad scope of the Western-like democratic institutions in place of the Soviet-times institutional framework;
- 2) referring, sometimes over-idealistically, to local political traditions preceding the Soviet dominance or rule which helped to emphasise the independence of foreign influence;
- 3) adapting, usually unconsciously, the social and psychological mechanisms and practices instilled during the Soviet times and under the communist rule to the new political environment.

Thus, the development of new political systems was based on a combination of recalling the individual political traditions of a given state, copying the Western-like institutional solutions (in particular as far as the compatibility of the local economic system with the international free market reality was concerned) and pragmatically adapting the political practice of a communist state (especially within the psychological

¹ For comparison of opinions: P. Grochmalski [2006]; T. Bodio [2010].

² For further elaboration on this topic see.: J. Pakulski [1991].

dimension) to the new reality³. In the context of the Colour Revolutions this meant that the political systems of Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan after the year 1991 were a combination of the idealised memory of the sovereign past, the political practice of the communist times and not always an agile introduction of the Western institutional innovations.

It is important to understand that the final effect of the post-Soviet transformation was neither a Western democracy nor a Soviet or Asian authoritarian state. The post-Soviet political reality is not a straightforward reference to an absolute rupture with the past. It is an inherently new reality based on an innovative combination of the Western standards, local traditions and the Soviet heritage. The post-Soviet space represents a qualitatively new and unique political reality. And just as the political reality of Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan is a function of the local, Western and Soviet influence, so are the political changes occurring within their borders. Thus, in search of the roots of the Colour Revolutions one should look not only to examine the theory and practice of the political revolutions in the traditional European understanding but one should also analyse how the historical examples of the regime change like the one which brought Nikita Khrushchev to power, had been translated into the Georgian, Ukrainian, and Kyrgyz reality.

While analysing the events one of course has to remember that in each case a set of individual conditions specific for each single state was involved (such as the problem of territorial integrity in the case of Georgia, the oligarchic structure of Ukraine, the Kyrgyz clannish history)⁴. In general each Colour Revolution was a case of the regime change that, contrary to expectations, did not represent a systemic change but the reshuffle of the political elites, though. In each case the society had demonstrated radical disobedience to the ruling post-communist regime. However, after the regime change the new political elites did not represent the disappointed masses but adhered to the existing rules of political game and adapted to the existing political reality instead of changing it. This was possible because:

- 1) the place of citizens in the decision-making process was assumed by other political actors, who usurped the role of the political sovereign (the presidential elites in Georgia, the oligarchs in Ukraine, the clans in Kyrgyzstan);
- 2) the democratic institutions and rules of conduct were a façade covering the post-Soviet mechanisms promoting the then modes of thought (the central

³ One should note that the changes were demanded by the society – the opposition, but executed by the state institutions still run by the old political elites. See.: T. Bodio [2012, p. 880].

⁴ More on these aspects: K. Kozłowski [2012, 2011].

- position of the presidential elites in Georgia, the paramount importance of the equilibrium between the oligarchs in Ukraine and between clans in Kyrgyzstan);
- 3) the idealised memory of the independence mixed with the rejuvenation of the ambitions of the civil society under slow formation left very little space for a genuine reflection on the true goals of the opposition leaders (in each case after just one term of office all the presidents were criticised for having abandoned or betrayed the ideals of the Colour Revolutions).

While looking for similarities and trying to classify the Rose, Orange and Tulip Revolutions under one scientific category it seems more accurate to treat them as the cases of an unsuccessful civil disobedience rather than of a revolution. At the initial stage of the protests in each case the citizens opposed the ruling regime and protested in the streets, which eventually led to the government collapse and regime change. However, the new elites used the act of disobedience to assume power but not to change the nature of the political system. In effect the events were hijacked by the new ruling class, which followed the same path as the old one leaving the society disappointed and radicalised⁵. In effect the only development resulting from the Colour Revolutions was the promotion of the part of the political stage that was discriminated by the earlier ruling elites, but without any significant change concerning the political system as a whole and involving a large and active part of the society left without any political representation.

Calling the events in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan revolutions is an intellectual shortcut. There is no doubt that all these states were going through a grave political crisis which spurred in the form of mass demonstrations and protests. The events created an impression of the political system first falling apart and then getting assembled back again by the new rulers of the states concerned. This led to a false assumption that the power change that resulted from the protests was an emanation of the systemic change while it remained just the elites' reshuffle. It is obvious that not every political crisis leads to a revolution. However, in the case of Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan a revolutionary assumption rather than a thorough political analysis proved to be more interesting and useful for the new regimes and international actors. In the long run, without popular support the pattern was unsustainable, though. Unfortunately, at the expense of the Georgian, Ukrainian, and Kyrgyz societies.

⁵ Actually the political elites in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan followed the type of the fraction struggle that resembled more the fraction fights within the communist party during the Soviet times rather than any well-known democratic pattern of the political parties competition.

The Interpretations of the Colour Revolutions

Two general interpretations have dominated the discussions concerning the Colour Revolutions. The first one is linked to the euphoric reactions to the civil mobilisation against the increasingly authoritarian regimes. From this perspective, the societies of Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan stood up against the depraved post-communist authoritarian rulers. The other is closely linked to the accusations of exporting revolutions to the Post-Soviet states against the interests of the Russian Federation. From this perspective the events were actually Western-inspired and mostly the U.S. sponsored coup d'états which aim was to push back the sphere of the Russian influence. Such radical differences in political narrations suggest the prime importance of the issue to the two above mentioned geopolitical camps in the post-Soviet space. The fact of the difference does not mean that both are not partly right, though. No one would deny the spontaneous nature of the Georgians marching towards the Parliament in Tbilisi, or the role of the Orange tent town in surviving in the middle of the winter season in the centre of Kiev, or the Kyrgyz people taking over the Presidential Palace in Bishkek. However, the mass mobilisation does not determine the democratic or civic character of the developments that followed. It is hard to defy the fact that the revolutionary organisations were supported by the institutions promulgating the Western-like democracy standards. It is obvious that these institutions are a vital part of the American Soft Power. However, it is also hard to approve of the opinions that the Soros Foundation or the USAID donations and support were enough to mobilise large parts of the Georgian, Ukrainian, and Kyrgyz societies as well as to topple the regimes that were enjoying the Hard Power advantage. Eventually, these were the Georgians, Ukrainians, and the Kyrgyz people who demonstrated in the streets and risked their lives and freedom against non-democratic rulers. Having a closer look it is hard not to have an impression that both approaches are to a large extent right as far as the merits are concerned. Yet, both are wrong as far as the magnitude of the phenomena they are dealing with goes.

In the each and every case of the Colour Revolution the already complex internal factors coincided with the not less complex developments in the international reality of the post-Soviet space. In the case of each and every Colour Revolution one can define at least three common elements of the background to the events.

First, since 1991 the post-Soviet space has experienced the political competition between the U.S. and the Russian Federation, along with the growing presence of the People's Republic of China and the varying level of activity of the E.U., Turkey and

Iran⁶. The Russian-American competition in the European part of the former Soviet Union or the Chinese economic expansion in Central Asia have become a natural element of the political background to the functioning of the whole Eastern Bloc. Thus, the analysts and researchers should not be surprised by the fact of the coincidence of the interests of these actors and the political changes within the states of the region.

Second, the post-Soviet space is too often reduced to being Russified or Westernised, to being European or Asian. In reality the post-Soviet space is an amalgam, a unique marriage of the local traditions, the post-Soviet heritage as well as the Western inspirations. In every state of the region the balance between them is a bit different, which results in the plethora of different political systems. However, all of them have common roots which make them different from any other political realities and make it futile to compare them to the American, Asian or European standards.

Third, all the regimes of the post-Soviet space had to redefine their positions in the landscape of the post-Cold War World [Staniszki, 2005, p. 106]. As their potential to address internal issues, economic in particular, depended on them being in line with the new international economic reality of globalisation, one of the most valuable assets was the trust of international institutions and organisations. In consequence most of them tried to structure their institutions in the way that best reflected the expectations of the international community. However, the accepted formal order did not always reflect the functioning of the new regimes or the real needs of the states they represented. Sometimes this meant that democratisation was perceived as less important than the formal alignment with the rapidly globalising global economy. In effect both the post-Soviet countries and the international institutions were often satisfied with the façade-like changes hiding the complexity of the unsolved problems left by the former communist system [Staniszki, 2005, p. 252].

These three elements have made the post-Soviet space complex and hard to comprehend for foreigners, who were to a large extent kept at bay for forty years that have passed by between the end of the Second World War and the dissolution of the USSR. If one combines this fact with the dynamics of the economic changes and the democratic euphoria of the nineties it is easy to understand why, on the one hand, the rest of the world was looking for easy and accessible labels to deal with the changes in the post-Soviet space, on the other hand, the political representatives of the post-Soviet states were satisfied with those labels. The straightforward revolutionary interpretation of the events in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan did not only legitimise the new regimes in the realm of international relations, but they

⁶ More on the concept of the New Great Game see: T. Stępniewski [2012].

also provided easy and useful explanations of international developments to both their opponents and supporters.

Explaining the revolutions in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan as exported by the West was useful for the regimes antagonistic toward the changes not only to blame the U.S. and the E.U. for foreign interference in the post-Soviet space. The threat of a revolution – whether real or not – became a convenient and popular excuse for imposing restrictions on civil activity and the imposition of an authoritarian turn in politics of the most post-Soviet states east of Belarus. The National Endowment for Democracy documented a long list of restrictions introduced to “counteract” the further export of revolutions to other authoritarian countries: abolishing the freedom of assembly, restricting the activity of NGOs including their registration and funding, exerting informal pressure on the members of NGOs, limiting or straightforwardly banning the activity of political opposition, making arbitrary decisions concerning the NGOs activity, the sources of funding and internal organisations⁷. The best examples are: the Russian law on non-governmental organisations (introduced in 2005), the changes in the Belarusian regulations concerning public assemblies (introduced in 2004) or the Uzbek regulations concerning NGOs introduced after the Andijan crisis of 2005⁸. The threat of the Western domination also served as the justification to broaden the activity of the election observatory missions of the Commonwealth of Independent States. Their major goal was to break the monopoly of the OSCE experts who would report the violations of the democratic procedures during the elections in the post-Soviet space. It is worth noticing that the results of the CIS and OSCE missions differ substantially. The only elections that were reported by the CIS observers not to meet the democratic standards were the repeated second term elections in Ukraine in 2005 – which were an outcome of the compromise between the blue and orange camps in Ukraine and were won by V. Yushchenko⁹.

Although it may seem to be a paradox, the Colour Revolutions in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan became one of the reasons most often given for the authoritarian turn in the post-Soviet space. The alleged democratic offensive of the West was countered by the authoritarian counteroffensive, especially in the Russian Federation. It must be emphasised that V. Yushchenko, M. Saakashvili, and K. Bakijev were all criticised through the application of pro-democratic language, they were accused of prosecuting the opposition and of exhibiting authoritarian ambitions. In consequence, the opponents of the Colour Revolutions portrayed themselves as

⁷ For the elicitation of limitations and a broad range of examples see: NED [2006].

⁸ For numerous examples, see.: WMD [2012].

⁹ For details see: A. Eberhardt [2009].

the true defenders of democracy and the ones who would denounce the Western hypocrisy and double standards¹⁰.

The supporters of the Rose, Orange, and Tulip Revolutions do not remain inactive, though. They do not quite often object the accusations of the promulgation of the Western values and standards, either. To the contrary, they embrace them. To paraphrase the opinion of Timothy Garton Ash on the Orange Revolution, they agree that it was the foreign interference in the affairs of the states where the Colour Revolutions were happening. However, it may have been legitimised as just and fair – as it followed the civil discontent in these states. The propagators of such a view state that just like the discussions concerning military interventions for humanitarian reasons have already begun, maybe it is time the discussions concerning the financial involvement in the cases of the violations of civil liberties and freedoms were held [Ash, 2009]. The supporters of the Georgian, Ukrainian, and Kyrgyz revolutions perceive them as the signs of a trend to legitimise the promotion of democracy by foreign actors. They perceive democratisation as a global trend, and supporting it may justify even the erosion of the notion of sovereignty [McFaul, 2004–2005, p. 148]. Thus, the Western involvement in the Colour Revolutions was right, the revolutions themselves were the justified outcome and the Western actions were legitimate. The supporters of the Colour Revolutions also agree that the Western support was crucial. Without the U.S. and European pressure and financial support the societies of Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan would not be able to exercise enough pressure on their governments to succeed [Trzaskowski, 2009, p. 88]. The only difference between the opponents and the supporters in that matter concerns how they treat the foreign involvement. For the latter the legitimacy of the Western interference is based on the fact of the evident violations of the electoral process and the denying on the part of the societies to peacefully influence the regime [Nodia, 2004, p. 113].

It is hard to defy the multiple electoral violations committed by the regimes of E. Shevardnadze, L. Kuchma, and A. Akajev. However, it is also hard to approve of the opinion that it was the only reason for the Western involvement. The U.S. energy interests in Georgia¹¹, the apparent Western ambitions to undermine the position of Russia in Ukraine¹² or the indispensable character of the NATO military base

¹⁰ For example: S. Kara-Murza [2012].

¹¹ The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline, an American investment of geopolitical importance to the U.S. in the Caucasus, in large part runs through the Georgian territory.

¹² It suffices to state that the Russian President V. Putin did not wait for the official announcement of the 2004 Ukrainian presidential election results to congratulate V. Yanukovych. He also offered support to him in the media during the presidential campaign in Ukraine.

in Kyrgyzstan for the ISAF and the Enduring Freedom missions in Afghanistan¹³ do not require an in-depth comment. Nevertheless, the opportunity for the pro-democratic involvement was not created by the Western actors but by the electoral violations and the rigged elections [Carothers, 2006, p. 62]. To paraphrase Richard Miles (the former U.S. ambassador to Belgrade and Tbilisi) and Feliks Stanievskij (the former Russian Federation ambassador to Tbilisi), the resentment of the Georgians against E. Shevardnadze was not planted by the West and it were not the Americans who drove them to demonstrate and protest in the streets¹⁴. If the government had not deeply disappointed and antagonised them, the protests and demonstrations would not have happened. And eventually, given the opportunity, it should not come as a surprise that West seized it to enlarge its area of influence.

Finally, one should not forget the new ruling elites of the three republics. M. Saakashvili, V. Yushchenko along with K. Bakiev concentrated on the reorganisation of the instruments of power in line with their interests. Their opponents, inside and outside of their countries, formed numerous accusations of the instrumental exploitation of the revolutionary slogans to assume power and phase out political competition¹⁵. Irrespective of their political affiliations, history seems to eventually confirm them. M Saakashvili is officially accused of corruption, V. Yushchenko failed to deliver any of his political promises, K. Bakiev after trying to monopolise the political power in Kyrgyzstan had to escape and headed to Belarus. However, the revolutionary image, even not supported by revolutionary changes, helped the new regimes to flawlessly establish contacts with the international environment and extend foreign financial aid, which proved vital for the expansion of their economies¹⁶. The fact that only Georgia was able to use it effectively is the subject to yet another debate.

The Colour Revolutions in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan unveiled the hidden mechanisms of the state and oligarchic model of capitalism in the post-Soviet space.

¹³ Kyrgyzstan, after the U.S. lost its base in Uzbekistan in 2005 in the aftermath of the Uzbek-Western tensions over the Andijan events, it was the only country providing the NATO and the U.S. with a military base supporting the U.S. and NATO interventions in Afghanistan.

¹⁴ More on two ambassadors' views: C. Welt [2009, pp. 155–188].

¹⁵ More on the criticism and accusations of the revolutionary leaders: V. Bunce, M.A. McFaul, K. Stoner-Weiss [2009, pp. 325–336].

¹⁶ In the above context it is worth noticing another interesting political trend in the post-Soviet, or more broadly speaking, former Eastern bloc area – the passive conformity of the political elites, inherited after the times of the USSR domination, to the external centres of Power. M Saakashvili, V. Yushchenko, and K. Bakiev seemed to fight for external support to be able to deal more efficiently with the internal challenges in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan, respectively. However, they also justified many of their unpopular decisions by picturing them as the requirements of international organisations to support their countries with external aid. Among foreign observers, the analogies between them and the local communist party representatives “showing off” in the times of the USSR to gain the Moscow support are getting more and more common. Some commentators are also pointing out similar patterns in new member states of the E.U. However, the topic requires a separate elaboration. *The Economist* [2010, p. 18].

The ruling regimes, as the managers of the public assets, both in economic and political terms, treated foreign aid as just another instrument at their disposal. In the context of the unstable internal economic situation and external problems caused by the Russian crisis of 1998 all the three countries needed the financial support that only international institutions were able to offer. In the case of the systems based on maintaining an equilibrium between the different oligarchic fractions, the public finances are used by the government to stabilise its own influence by redistributing public assets between the various groups of interest. The Rose, Orange, and Tulip Revolutions showed that Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan were no exceptions.

The Colour Revolutions also showed that an ability to obtain foreign financial support is crucial to political stability and the lack of it may lead to a brutal day of reckoning, when the actors forgotten by the government demand what they see as their own. The young opposition politicians in Georgia represented by M. Saakashvili, the increasingly marginalised West Ukrainian political and business elites represented by V. Yushchenko, and the southern clans of Kyrgyzstan led by K. Bakiev were fighting for public assets available only to the ruling elite. The agile exploitation of social mobilisation by the opposition leaders allowed them to hide this aspect during the process of the Power change. However, their success was achieved at the expense of the protesting society, which was left alone again.

There is just one problem remaining. The political elites, both in the West and in the East, while dealing with the elites of the post-Soviet states, have forgotten about the societies of the states in question. Today they call for recognition. The social outrage against the Rose revolutionary – M. Saakashvili – in Georgia, the inability of the Ukrainian politicians to build a long-lasting social consensus and political base for their parties even in a war situation, the inability to address the ethnic instability issue in Kyrgyzstan by any Kyrgyz politician, all these elements show that a gap between society and the state has grown beyond measure in every single country mentioned. After over two decades of being left behind, even despite the genuine civic mobilisation and protests at grass-roots level, today the citizens of Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan lost trust in the state. To a large extent they perceive it as an alien, just like in the Soviet times. In today's unstable post-Soviet reality, as the political tensions grow this process strips the already vulnerable states off the most important political asset – i.e. the popular, national legitimacy. In the case of a potential future crisis this may leave the political elites alone against the rising tide of economic, social, or international challenges. And just like in the case of Georgia in 2008, Kyrgyzstan in 2010, and Ukraine in 2014, the politicians who cannot involve even their own citizens to back them up, they cannot count on any form of foreign support and are left alone even against external aggression.

Calling the Georgian, Ukrainian and Kyrgyz events revolutions offered a convenient explanation for every actor interested in promulgating their own interests in the post-Soviet region while the results of the events were revolutionary in the very name, exclusively. The revolutionary interpretation was useful both for the Western-like supporters of the changes (to expand the area of influence), the pro-Russian antagonists of the regime reshuffle (as it provided a handy explanation of their failure in the region because of the Western expansion) and for the new political elites as well (they were the only ones who were able to fill in the political void left after the post-communists' collapse). The international community was able to do business the traditional way. However, everyone seemed to overlook the last element of the puzzle – the societies that took their grief to the streets to be left without any representation when the dust of the political battle settled. As the contemporary history shows, the consequences were not immediate but eventually proved to be inevitable.

Summary

The political changes in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan uncover the still active geopolitical and economic processes which strongly influence the reality of the post-Soviet space while being rarely spotted by the foreign observers [Shevcov, 2005]. The new ruling elites had developed their position on the basis of the revolutionary social mobilisation. Despite the conflict with Russia, Georgia established itself as an important Western ally in the Caucasus. Today, it is one of the most business-friendly states in the region. However, the society expects the revolutionary elites to be held accountable for the violations committed after the year 2003. The Orange Revolution proved that not only did Ukraine need Russia but it also showed that Russia needed Ukraine. The recent conflict between these states shows that the dispute is far from being settled. The social disconnection between the Ukrainian politicians and the Ukrainian society resulted in Kiev's inability to respond quickly and adequately to the annexation of Crimea as well as to the still ongoing protests against almost every representative of the former political circles, including the acting president. The Tulip Revolution unveiled the deep fragmentation of the Kyrgyz society. K. Bakiev initially was successful in winning support of the foreign powers but proved to be unable to balance the clans' interests and the demands of the society. His reign did not survive one presidential term and ended in political chaos and ethnic clashes¹⁷.

¹⁷ Since the beginning of K. Bakiev's rule, the Russian Federation exerted pressure on Kyrgyzstan not to provide the U.S. with the Manas military base. Irrespective of the declarations to end the lease of

The Georgian, Ukrainian, and Kyrgyzstan democratic revolutions represented an agile manner to come to terms with the complex reality of the post-Soviet space. In the short run, for the West it was a success, for Russia it represented the reason to legitimise the authoritarian turn, for the new ruling elites to gain legitimacy in the international landscape. Thus, interpreting the events as revolutions proved to be useful for the international actors involved in the post-Soviet space politics as well as for the new post-revolutionary regimes. However, in the long run the consequences of a society abandoned by the politicians may be far more important than the outcome of the political competition between the West and the Russian Federation.

The more time has passed by since the Rose, Orange, and Tulip Revolutions, the more controversial they become. Their long-term consequences are ambiguous, to say the least. The democratic image of the protests did not translate into the democratic change. Quite the opposite, as time passes by, the democratic ideals seem to fade away while the revolutionaries consolidated their powers and chose the increasingly authoritarian path. M. Saakashvili is to stand trial under the accusations of the abuse of power. V. Yushchenko lost to V. Yanukovych and will be remembered in the Ukrainian political history as an example of a complete political failure. K. Bakiyev was himself overthrown by another rebellion and had to flee from his own country. According to international standards after the Colour Revolutions all of the countries experienced a dent in terms of democratic and civil freedoms/liberties. Georgia had made a step back in the control of its own territory. Ukraine's politics fell into turmoil as the country was attacked from the outside and its regime was unable to come to terms with its own citizens. Kyrgyzstan experienced another series of outbursts of ethnic and political violence acts, and is an example of a chronic political, social, and economic crisis.

The vision of the democratic Colour Revolutions was useful in the short run. The victory has borne fruit but not to the citizens who protested and democracy supporters. The new ruling elites assumed power, the West and Russia reorganised their areas of influence but the citizens were left alone. In the long run this strategy did not work out well, though. The state institutions without gaining support proved to be too weak to face the mounting economic and security challenges. Georgia and Ukraine faced the Russian military threat – this time more strongly than ever. Kyrgyzstan tumbled into instability. The façade of the democratic change was enough to phase out the competition and to resolve the most pending internal and international problems.

the base to the Americans, the K. Bakiyev regime continued cooperating with the U.S. in exchange for several increases in fees involving the base activity. For details concerning the Manas base management see: K. Kozłowski [2009, p. 233].

The annexation of Crimea and the war in East Ukraine, the Georgian loss of Southern Ossetia and Abkhazia, Kyrgyzstan's reliance on the Russian help prove that it was far too early for the declaration of victory of the democratic fourth wave. Without gaining civil support, which was yet wasted after the year 2003 in Tbilisi, 2004 in Kiev, and 2005 in Bishkek, Georgia, the Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan regimes are often unable to persuade even their own citizens to back them up. In the long run this may turn all of them into the pawns of the international balance of interests as without gaining sincere domestic support they may count only on foreign help to survive. And as the V. Yanukovich story shows, even the support offered by a strong neighbour may not always guarantee the surviving of the outrage of its own people.

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